

## **Chapter 3.1**

### **Hungary**

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After a fifty-year interval, in 2001, the Hungarian census asked again about the religious affiliation of citizens. According to the strictly voluntary answers of respondents, 268,935 persons in Hungary considered themselves Greek Catholics. Over 7.5 million Hungarians are affiliated with a religion or church, and 5.25 million of them are Roman Catholics. In contemporary Hungary, the Greek Catholics rank as the fourth largest religious community after the Roman Catholics, the Reformed, and the Lutherans; however, this is not always so obvious because Byzantine- and Latin-Rite Catholics are often grouped together. Greek Catholics make up 2.6 per cent of the entire population and 3.5 per cent of those identifying themselves as religious.<sup>1</sup>

The overall proportion of Greek Catholics in Hungary is small, but in their region of origin, their share of the population becomes more significant. As a characteristic East-Central European phenomenon, Greek Catholicism has traditionally been widespread in the northeastern regions of post-Trianon Hungary.<sup>2</sup> A century ago, Greek Catholics lived in inferior economic, geographic, and cultural conditions as compared to the national average. This and their original range outside post-Trianon Hungary have had their consequences. Nationally, Hungarians hardly know of Greek Catholicism, while in these northeastern areas it is an obvious, well-known social and religious phenomenon to be taken seriously. Among the total population of 580,000 in the northeastern County of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, 102,484 people identify with Greek Catholicism. In the southeastern part of this county, near the towns Nagykálló and Nyírbátor, every third inhabitant is Greek Catholic.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the 2001 census data on religious affiliation see the Central Statistical Office homepage: [http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/eng/volumes/26/tables/load1\\_1.html](http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/eng/volumes/26/tables/load1_1.html) (accessed 4 April 2006).

<sup>2</sup> The Treaty of Trianon (1920) assigned territories with Hungarian and non-Hungarian Greek Catholic communities from Hungary to Slovakia (the Northernmost parts), to Romania (the Székely areas and Partium), and to Ukraine (Subcarpathia).

<sup>3</sup> Total population: 582,256, (141,000 Roman Catholic and 241,000 Reformed); detailed information in Hungarian: [http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/hun/kotetek/05/tables/load3\\_17.html](http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/hun/kotetek/05/tables/load3_17.html),



Even the smallest village in this county has three churches (Roman Catholic, Reformed, and Greek Catholic). In the other northeastern county, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, the census recorded 54,699 Greek Catholics out of a total population somewhat over 744,000.<sup>4</sup> In Hajdú-Bihar County, with over 550,000 inhabitants, 47,259 people identified themselves as Greek Catholics. Most live in and around Debrecen and Hajdúböszörmény; other minor regions of the county recorded communities of a few hundred persons.<sup>5</sup> Apart from the northeastern regions of the country, 28,901 Greek Catholics lived in Budapest,<sup>6</sup> with another 13,232 in the surrounding Pest County.<sup>7</sup> The Hungarian Greek Catholic history reflects this distribution: various liturgical or ecclesiastic reform movements started from the northeastern areas of the country, and then were developed further by an elite that had managed to move to Budapest.<sup>8</sup> As a result of this odd regional distribution, a particular duality characterizes even today's pastoral efforts: apart from the northeastern areas, where a particular Greek Catholic identity pioneered both liturgical and cultural innovation after centuries-long acculturation processes, throughout the greater part of Hungary, pastoral care focuses on a 'diaspora'.

The political changes that began in 1989 provided the opportunity of a new beginning in Greek Catholic Church life in Hungary. An omnipotent ideology that had attempted to extirpate religion root and branch fell, and the state ceased direct control and supervision of church activities.<sup>9</sup> Hungarians

short summary in English: [http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/eng/volumes/26/tables/loadgkat3\\_1.html](http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/eng/volumes/26/tables/loadgkat3_1.html) (accessed 4 April 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Total population: 744,404 (351,000 Roman Catholic and 194,000 Reformed); detailed information in Hungarian: [http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/hun/kotetek/05/tables/load3\\_6.html](http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/hun/kotetek/05/tables/load3_6.html), short summary in English: [http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/eng/volumes/26/tables/loadgkat3\\_1.html](http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/eng/volumes/26/tables/loadgkat3_1.html) (accessed 4 April 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Total population: 552,998 (73,000 Roman Catholic and 236,000 Reformed); detailed information in Hungarian: [http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/hun/kotetek/05/tables/load3\\_10.html](http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/hun/kotetek/05/tables/load3_10.html), short summary in English: [http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/eng/volumes/26/tables/loadgkat3\\_1.html](http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/eng/volumes/26/tables/loadgkat3_1.html) (accessed 4 April 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Detailed information in Hungarian: [http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/hun/kotetek/05/tables/load3\\_2.html](http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/hun/kotetek/05/tables/load3_2.html), short summary in English: [http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/eng/volumes/26/tables/loadgkat3\\_1.html](http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/eng/volumes/26/tables/loadgkat3_1.html) (accessed 4 April 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Detailed information in Hungarian: [http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/hun/kotetek/05/tables/load3\\_15.html](http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/hun/kotetek/05/tables/load3_15.html), short summary in English: [http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/eng/volumes/26/tables/loadgkat3\\_1.html](http://www.nepszamlalas.hu/eng/volumes/26/tables/loadgkat3_1.html) (accessed 4 April 2006).

<sup>8</sup> For a general discussion of the history of Hungarian Greek Catholicism, see Pirigyí 1990.

<sup>9</sup> For an overview of the situation of the churches before the changes, see Török 2003. According to current researches the state control was severe. Simultaneously with the retirement of the Hungarian Greek Catholic bishop, Szilárd Keresztes, an unconfirmed, but archive-based scholarly study appeared on his cooperation with Hungarian Secret Services dating back to the late 1960s. The paper reveals the similar involvement of the previous bishop, Imre Timkó, cf. Szabó 2007.



debate whether religion is a private or a public affair, but churches are now free to involve themselves in activities that go beyond simply organizing religious life. Thus, Hungarian citizens can freely choose to send their children to denominational educational institutions from kindergarten to university. In addition, churches have an increasing role in providing social and health care (see Mahieu 2006).

The changes of 1989–90 affected Greek Catholics too, the majority of whom lived on the eastern, economically undeveloped periphery of the country, largely in rural areas. The church itself had but one institution: the seminary in Nyíregyháza, which, surprisingly, had been founded in 1950 shortly after the Communist takeover of the country. In general the Greek Catholic Church shared the plight of the other churches. However, compared to the Roman Catholic Church it has had more success in recruiting priests and church workers, a problem that has forced the Latin church to introduce momentous changes.

The 1991 papal visit to Hungary inaugurated a renewal of Roman Catholic religious life. Pope John Paul II also celebrated a Byzantine-Rite mass in Hungarian at Máriapócs, the most important Greek Catholic shrine in Hungary (Ruthenian, Slovakian, and Romanian believers participated too) – thereby stressing the legitimation of the Hungarian language in liturgy.<sup>10</sup> The order of St Basil the Great, which had maintained the shrine, was re-established,<sup>11</sup> and a new guesthouse built to serve the needs of pilgrims. To commemorate the most recent tear shedding of the Madonna icon, the church organized a centennial jubilee in 2005, with a rich devotional, artistic, and scholarly program (Ivancsó 2005). Hungarian Greek Catholicism has established connections with Greek Catholic communities in the neighbouring countries, which often have to cope with a multiple minority fate.<sup>12</sup> The Hungarian community has primarily supported the renewal of religious life in their sister communities of Subcarpathia in Ukraine which were persecuted when they belonged to the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> Annually, about twenty

<sup>10</sup> It must be noted that the liturgy held in Hungarian language on 19 November 1965 in Rome during the Second Vatican Council is considered to be the first official acceptance of the Hungarian language for the Byzantine-Rite liturgy.

<sup>11</sup> Some of their publications include Keresztes 1996; Lakatos 1997.

<sup>12</sup> By multiple minority fate, we mean that living, for example, as a Greek Catholic community in Orthodox Romania is a form of minority existence. Being Hungarian in a Greek Catholic community in Romania with a Romanian majority is a further level of minority existence. During the re-annexation of northern Transylvania during the Second World War, some particularly interesting sources were established in this respect as a result of the offices of a Hungarian civil servant surveying the area (Balog 1992).

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the Subcarpathian Greek Catholicism, see Bendász 1991; Botlik 1997; Pirigyi 2001.



Hungarian Greek Catholic youths from the neighbouring countries study at the Nyíregyháza seminary. Greek Catholic diaspora communities have become better organized and more 'visible': new communities have established themselves, or older diaspora communities have had the chance of openly participating in the church life of the 'recipient' towns. The increase of social and geographical mobility will probably dissolve the Greek Catholic 'block area', and Greek Catholics will increasingly exist in diaspora communities in cities.<sup>14</sup> Defying diaspora conditions, Hungarian Greek Catholicism has a strong Internet presence.<sup>15</sup>

With regard to worship, a marked turn to the East can be observed. Works expounding Eastern Rites have an important role in Hungarian Greek Catholic book publishing (Ivancsó 1996a, 1999),<sup>16</sup> as Eastern spirituality becomes generally popular in Hungary. This can be readily observed in the historical study of church architecture and in the building and decoration of churches, thoroughly studied by Bernadett Puskás and Géza Nagymihályi (B. Puskás 1991, 1996, 2008; L. Puskás 1991; Nagymihályi 1995, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; Sasvári 2001). All this has contributed an ever more independent profile to Hungarian Greek Catholicism, as it steps out from under the shadow of the vast Roman Catholic Church. Some studies of Greek Catholic authors discussing the relation to Roman Catholicism from a theological point of view exemplify the struggle for a distinct identity (e.g. Baán 1997a; L. Puskás 1998a).

Recent years have witnessed an unprecedented growth in the religious, educational, and social institutions of the Greek Catholic Church, very much in accordance with the desires of the early twentieth-century Greek Catholic elite. István Gróh, a member of this elite and a founding editor of *Görögkatolikus Szemle* (Greek Catholic Review), wrote in the magazine's first issue in 1929: 'We need authority, social weight and acknowledgement, Greek Catholic institutions; recollection will not do, we must act and create' (Gróh 1929: 1). The Hungarian Greek Catholic Church evaded the fate of similar churches in the neighboring countries: it was not forced to merge with others, and could maintain its full-fledged independent existence. Its only institution was the Nyíregyháza Theological College, which trained students exclusively for the ministry (c.f. Hollós 2001; Oláh 2001). Since 1990, the laity could also enrol and study theology. Since 1991, teachers of religion

<sup>14</sup> Consideration of diaspora communities had already begun in the interwar period (Magyar 1987).

<sup>15</sup> The most important links are: <http://www.atanaz.hu/>, <http://parochia.hu/> and <http://gorogkatolikus.lap.hu/> (accessed 4 April 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Attention should be given to a parallel, but reverse process, the dissemination of Western cult forms (e.g. the cult of the Sacred Heart of Jesus) in the interwar period.



have also been trained at the college. In 1995, the theological college and the seminary separated, and the college affiliated with the Pontificio Istituto Orientale of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome and became a university faculty. In 2000, it took the name Saint Athanasius Greek Catholic Theological College. Its graduates thus receive the bachelor's degree of a pontifical university. In 2003, the college moved into its new, modern building – a dominant piece of architecture in the city center of Nyíregyháza (Ivancsó 2000).

The foundations of a Greek Catholic educational system were also revitalized. In one of the significant centres, Hajdúdorog, the Greek Catholic Church had operated a gymnasium (secondary school) for centuries; however, in 1947–48 it was nationalized – along with the vast majority of church schools. This school was one of the first to be re-established after the changes. Seeing its successes, the church started a kindergarten and a secondary boarding school in the town. The diocese runs kindergartens and primary schools in Nyíregyháza, Miskolc, and Rakacaszend.

Nyíregyháza has become a major centre of Greek Catholic scholarship. The college and seminary staffs pursue research on Greek Catholic church history and also participate in scholarly life at both regional and national levels. Constant invitations to join non-theological scientific committees attest to their scholarly reputation, as does the 2003 election of a Greek Catholic priest and professor, György Fodor, as Rector of Pázmány Péter Catholic University (Budapest – Esztergom – Piliscsaba). Along with the college and the seminary, scholars and students have access to the church art collection in Nyíregyháza, the diocesan archives, and the best library on Greek Catholicism in Hungary.

Freed from socialist repression, the Greek Catholic press has also revived. In 1990, the new series of the monthly *Görögkatolikus Szemle* (Greek Catholic Review) published by the Hajdúdorog Bishop's Office began to provide information on matters of worship and practice. The review also publishes its annual almanac. Local papers were also started.<sup>17</sup> The theological college's scholarly activities are regularly published in conference publications and monographs as well as in the scholarly magazine, *Athanasiana*, launched in 1995, when the college affiliated with the pontifical institution. Further publication opportunities for researchers at the college include the *Studia Biblica Athanasiana*, a magazine of scriptural research; the *Folia Canonica – Review of Eastern and Western Canon Law*, a joint enterprise with Péter Pázmány Catholic University; the foreign-language *Folia Athana-*

<sup>17</sup> E.g. *A szegedi görögkatolikusok tudósítója* [The Szeged Greek Catholic Correspondent], a bimonthly since 1993, edited by Miklós Szaploneczay.



*siana Review of Byzantine Theology*; and *Munkálatok* (Work in Progress), a series devoted to disseminating the work of the college students.

Naturally, the press and scholarly publications are not merely a means of conveying information; they are also a symbol of self-assertion. Since 1990, Hungarian Greek Catholic scholarship has undergone significant renewal, partly fueled by the commemoration of important anniversaries in an array of successful conferences. Thus a conference in Nyíregyháza commemorated the centenary of the papal encyclical *Orientalium dignitas* (Orosz 1995). In 1996, a conference on ecclesiastical history celebrated the three-hundredth anniversary of the first tear shedding of the holy icon at Máriapócs.<sup>18</sup> In 2000 the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Nyíregyháza Theological College was duly commemorated (Janka 2001).

Individual authors have also produced outstanding works, notably in the field of church history. István Pirigyi dedicated decades to the elaboration of a Greek Catholic history and his prolific work has made him a key figure in Hungarian Greek Catholic historiography.<sup>19</sup> István Ivancsó, beside being an editor of *Athanasia*, published several works on liturgical and church historical questions. He wrote a monographic study on Moses the Hungarian, a tenth-century, pre-schism Kiev monk of Hungarian origin (Ivancsó 1997).<sup>20</sup> Hungarian Greek Catholic tradition always gave particular significance to the pre-schism period, and earlier studies anachronistically regarded the emergence of the Eastern Rite in the Carpathian Basin in the tenth century as an early example of Greek Catholicism. Although this discourse is disappearing, attempts to create a very closed, independent tradition, neither Eastern nor Western, have not disappeared entirely.<sup>21</sup> István Pirigyi published a study of an exclusively Greek Catholic 'example', Péter Parthén, the seventeenth-century bishop of Mukachevo who took great pains to uphold the union (Pirigyi 1996). Numerous publications have been devoted to the postwar martyr of the Ukrainian Orthodox reunion, Theodore

<sup>18</sup> *Máriapócs 1696 – Nyíregyháza 1996. Történelmi konferencia a máriapócsi Istenszülő-ikon első könnyezésének 300. évfordulójára* [History Conference on the 300th Anniversary of the First Tear Shedding of the Theotokos Icon at Máriapócs].

<sup>19</sup> His most important monographs include Pirigyi 1982, 1990, 1991, 1998, 1999, 2001; on his life and activity cf. Janka 2002; Kiss 2002.

<sup>20</sup> István Ivancsó also translated and annotated a work of particular significance for general church history, the fourth-century travel journals of Eteria, regarded as one of the earliest pilgrimage diaries (Ivancsó 1996b).

<sup>21</sup> Apart from establishing – or more precisely, retrospectively inventing – a thousand years long, continuous Hungarian Greek Catholic tradition (a characteristic activity of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries), the post-1990 church changed its orientation towards the East as its spiritual centre. This is in contrast to the highly Latinized, Western-oriented, Hungarian Greek Catholic tradition of the past century.



Romzha (see Puskás 1998b). These examples indicate that Hungarian Greek Catholic historiography has a predilection for themes deemed acceptable, specific, neither Eastern nor Western. The discourse of the interwar years characterized the Greek Catholic struggles for independence as a type of national struggle, and such vocabulary is still used.<sup>22</sup> Today, however, when Greek Catholics no longer suffer national prejudice, it is indicative of a self-confident Greek Catholicism capable of withstanding the appeal of Roman Catholicism. Reprints also have a conspicuous role in promoting Hungarian Greek Catholic identity. Among them, the republication of the Memorandum on the 1900 pilgrimage to Rome<sup>23</sup> and the 1793 manuscript translation of the liturgy of St John Chrysostom<sup>24</sup> have to be mentioned here. To understand the ethnic processes, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century history, especially on a local level, is considered an important topic. István Baán contributed to Greek Catholic church history in numerous studies focusing especially on the times around the first millennium and the eighteenth century (1988, 1995, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1997d, 2005, 2007). Individual Greek Catholic parishes have also been subjected to scrutiny by historians (e.g. Pirigyi and Ivancsó 1993; Pirigyi, Farkas and Papp 1998).

Hungarian Greek Catholicism has become a preferred object of scholarly attention outside of the church as well. Besides historical questions related to the Rusyn language, the late István Udvardi made a large contribution to the investigation of Greek Catholic church history and the connection of Hungarian and Ruthenian social and cultural history (Udvari 1990, 1992). American historian James Niessen published studies on questions related to the history of the Hungarian Greek Catholics (Niessen 1991, 1993, 1994). Greek Catholics as a particular phenomenon on the border of Western and Eastern Europe are continuously attracting scholarly interest (Bottlik 1997; Maner-Spannenberger 2007). The folklorist Elek Bartha has studied Greek Catholic popular religion for decades and published his findings in numerous studies (1980; 1990; 1999, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b). Other studies focused on particular religious customs and the cult of saints (Magyari 1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2002; Sasvári 1998). In a series of studies Irén Szabó thoroughly analysed gestures and space usage featuring Greek

<sup>22</sup> For one of the best examples of such literature see Papp 1996.

<sup>23</sup> *Emlékkönyv a görög szertartású katolikus magyarok római zarándoklatáról* [Memorandum on the Pilgrimage to Rome by Greek Rite Hungarian Catholics]. Budapest, 1901, (reprint Hajdúdorog: Mészáros Károly Városi Könyvtár, 2000), Internet edition: <http://www.atanaz.hu/mgke/emlekko/index.htm> (accessed 4 April 2006); for an analysis see Pusztai 2005.

<sup>24</sup> The work of Mihály Krucsay: *Lithurgia: Az az isteni Szt. szolgálat vagy mise, mely Aranyszájú Szt. János munkáiból magyar nyelvre átültetett* [Liturgy: That Is, the Divine Sacred Service or Mass translated into Hungarian from the Works of St John Chrysostom]. Edited and postscript written by István Ivancsó (2003).



Catholic liturgy and everyday life (Szabó 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2005). Greek Catholicism has also become the subject of religious geography (Keményfi 2000). Several ethnographic studies focusing on contemporary social processes and especially on relations between ethnic identity and religion among Hungarians in Transylvania (Ilyés 1998, 1999, 2001), Transcarpathia (Pilipkó 1997, 1999, 2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2007; Pusztai 1997, 2001; Geszti 2001; Domokos 2004), and Hungary (Szabó 1999; Pusztai 2002; Teleko 2002) have been published recently. Other works have focused on the cultural historical (Cserbák 1986) and discursive political (Pusztai 2003, 2005, 2007) dimensions of Greek Catholic identity creation have also found their place in fresh research projects.

In summary, we can state that Hungarian Greek Catholics, in spite of the threats of migration and melting into Roman Catholicism, have proven to be a viable and vigorous, cohesive, and agile community that actively seeks its identity, and on the whole seems to have found it.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> For a Greek Catholic self-assessment of the past decade see Soltész 2002.



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Stéphanie Mahieu and Vlad Naumescu (eds.)

# Churches In-between

Greek Catholic Churches  
in Postsocialist Europe

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Postfach 2, D-48159 Münster

LIT VERLAG Dr. W. Hoff, Berlin 2008

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-3-8528-9910-3

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche  
Nationalbibliothek; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at  
http://dnb.d-nb.de



Cover Photo: Icon of Josaphat Kuntsevych (d. 1623), the first martyr saint of the Greek Catholics (Lutowiska, Southeast Poland, early twentieth century).



Gedruckt auf alterungsbeständigem Werkdruckpapier entsprechend  
ANSI Z3948 DIN ISO 9706

**Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**  
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche  
Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at  
<http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISBN 978-3-8258-9910-3

**A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library**

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